

## **MAKING SYSTEMS CHANGES THAT PREVENT HOMELESSNESS**

*GOAL: Mainstream programs (mental health, substance abuse, TANF, child welfare, etc.) that provide care and services to low-income people consistently assess and respond to their housing needs.*

*GOAL: There is placement in stable housing for all people being released from public institutions.*

Most people who become homeless are eligible for assistance from mainstream systems of care, and many are or recently have been active clients of one or more of these systems. Studies on where homeless people have lived immediately before becoming homeless show trends that suggest solutions.

Public systems or institutions, such as jails and prisons, hospitals, the child welfare system and mental health facilities, too often "graduate" people directly into the homeless system. One aspect of prevention is to stop these discharges into homelessness, through basic transition planning so that people leaving these institutions have stable housing and some means for maintaining it.

Other people who become homeless still are, or should be, clients of mainstream systems of care. These systems can prevent homelessness by paying attention to the housing stability of the people they assist, particularly those who are at greatest risk of homelessness due to lack of family supports, extremely low incomes, mental illness or other personal difficulties.

### **Examples**

**Connecticut Department of Children and Families Housing Continuum.** In the past several years, Connecticut revamped the service delivery to adolescents in their care. Youth work their way through a continuum of housing options, moving from highly structured, supervised living arrangements to a transitional phase where support is provided while structure and restriction is decreased. A description of this approach is available at <http://www.endhomelessness.org/best/CTyouth.htm>

**Illinois Department of Children and Families Youth Housing Assistance Program.** The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services developed a housing advocacy program to provide youth aging out of foster care with housing assistance. The program helps young people locate housing and provides youth with cash assistance and partial housing subsidies. For additional information on this program, go to <http://www.endhomelessness.org/best/ILyouth.htm>

**Lighthouse Youth Services Housing Continuum.** Lighthouse prevents youth in child welfare from becoming homeless by employing a semi-supervised scattered-site apartment model based on the philosophy that young people learn best by "doing" and that youth should have opportunities to live on their own and develop self-sufficiency skills prior to discharge from care. Further information on this program is available at <http://www.endhomelessness.org/best/lighthouse.htm>

**Minnesota Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program.** Minnesota's TANF system helps to fund FHPAP, which in turn funds local agencies to prevent homelessness. Prevention activities include work with landlords and crisis intervention. A profile of this program, which also addresses other aspects of homelessness, is at <http://www.endhomelessness.org/best/fhpap.htm>

**New Mexico Adolescent Transition Groups.** New Mexico has established entities to take responsibility for young people transitioning from out-of-home care into adulthood. A description appears at <http://www.endhomelessness.org/best/ATG.htm>

## **Resources**

- *Essential Tools for Discharge Planning.* This report documents and extracts lessons from five years of effort by the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance to successfully encourage good discharge planning practices by inpatient health care facilities. It provides a thorough, detailed guide for those seeking adoption of effective policies and practices at the state or local level. Available on line at: <http://www.nhchc.org/discharge>
- *Preventing Homelessness Among People with Serious Mental Illness: A Guide for States,* published by the National Resource Center on Homelessness and Mental Illness, describes risk factors for homelessness, and some examples of state mental health systems that have adopted policies to prevent homelessness. Available on line at [http://www.nrchmi.com/pdfs/publications/Preventing\\_Homelessness.pdf](http://www.nrchmi.com/pdfs/publications/Preventing_Homelessness.pdf)
- *Preventing Homelessness: Discharge Planning from Corrections Facilities,* published by the Community Shelter Board of Columbus, OH, presents an overview of the issue and effective ideas at the program and policy levels. A good example of a persuasive background piece used in a local community. Available on line at: [http://www.csb.org/What\\_s\\_New/FinalReportAug2002/Final%20Report%20August%202002.pdf](http://www.csb.org/What_s_New/FinalReportAug2002/Final%20Report%20August%202002.pdf)
- *Family Unification Program.* Through the Family Unification Project (FUP), child welfare agencies and public housing authorities collaborate to provide safe, affordable housing for families who have been separated from their children or at-risk of separation due to homelessness, domestic violence, or inadequate housing, and youth ages 18-21 who are transitioning out of foster care. For more information on FUP, see: <http://www.cwla.org/programs/housing/>